

ECEN Assembly 2021

Opening Speech by Jorgen Skov Sorensen CEC General Secretary

Dear friends gathered at the 13th Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network – it is a privilege and honour for me to greet you as participants of this 2021 ECEN Assembly.

In a time with severe restrictions on movement – self-imposed or as measures by our respective governments – it is obvious that the ecumenical movement - of which ECEN is a part - is suffering.

Well aware that this year you gather in a virtual way, I cherish that so many have found their way to being together even if in a two dimensional way on a screen. We all long to get together in proper physical meetings. But let us rejoice that with modern technology and virtual meetings we can reach broader audiences than when we get together physically.

If you are here with ECEN for the first time, prompted by the fact that you needed no travel nor accommodation, I welcome you in particular. I am happy that you are able to be part of this virtual set-up.

As supporters of ECEN, also, we cannot but feeling pleased that a virtual meeting, even if not fully carbon neutral, certainly is better for the environment than all of us boarding a plane or even a train to get to the same place.

Restrictions of movement. What is the ecumenical movement if you take the movement out of it, one may rightly ask. Well, it is still ecumenical and that is – at the end of the day - still what matters the most.

Let me take you back some 30 years. As a student I signed up for a journey that would change my life. My first visit ever to The Ecumenical Institute at Bossey. The international centre for encounter, dialogue and formation of the World Council of Churches. My first encounter with the ecumenical movement.

Why do I take you back to my first encounter with the ecumenical movement? Well, first and foremost because what I remember most strongly from the introductions to the work of the WCC was the already then powerful ecumenical commitment to the protection of the environment and concern for the climate. Some 15 years later, when I was heading the Ecumenical Department of my home church in Copenhagen, I experienced our representatives returning from the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, lit by the fire of a “green agenda” which had been at the top of the priorities at that gathering.

The rest is history. Everyone speaks of climate and environment today. But I wish to highlight the role of churches, of the Ecumenical Movement, initiating this discourse and insisting in it even before it became everybody’s choice.

This is why “ecumenical” and “ecumenism” is so important. Together we have a key that opens the minds and hearts of people of all sorts. My own heart and mind was opened back then in Bossey. I trust you all have stories not dissimilar to mine. So how do we today find our new role in a world where we have succeeded in writing the agenda?

I am very pleased to see that as part of your deliberations the next few days theological reflections make up a significant part: “Does Climate Change and Sustainable Future Pose a Particular Theological Concern?”.

His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in his address “The Role of the Churches in Today’s Europe” at College of Europe, Bruges, 11 November 2019, speaks of the role of churches:

We believe that all of humanity needs [...] grounding as in Plato’s statement that “God is the measure of all things” formulated against the maxim of Protagoras that “man is the measure of all things”.

This conviction could be seen as the foundation of the work of ECEN also. Similarly it can be identified as that which sets us apart from secular organisations with similar agendas, some of which tend to follow Protagoras rather than Plato.

We should not be ashamed that as Christians we have something to add. Your theme “Reconciled with Earth” points to a healthy, theologically reflected direction. I encourage you to take advantage of that...!

I look forward to hearing about the outcome of your days together in virtual (eco-friendly) fellowship. And I look forward to seeing ECEN move on - through your commitment, still and always as part of - indeed - the Ecumenical Movement. I wish you a fruitful assembly - reconciled with earth, now and in the future.

Thank you and God bless you all.